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ABSTRACT

In response to federal inquiry, Ogden, Utah moved in 1970 to implement a desegregation plan entitled "A Voluntary Plan to Reduce Minority Group Isolation and Its Effects". Central to the plan was the consolidation of five elementary schools. Existing boundaries were redrawn to accommodate the former students of these five schools in newly constructed schools. Parents within four blocks of the schools were given the option of sending their children to either one of the new schools or to existing elementary schools. The new boundaries altered the ratio of minority to majority students in four elementary schools and served as an effective means of desegregating these Ogden schools. A total of 2,209 students were affected by the initial phase of the desegregation plan. During 1974 the district began developing remedial reading and math classes designed to overcome the educational effects of minority group isolation. Curriculum changes in the area of ethnic studies were also made. These efforts proved to be inadequate. The final, most telling impetus for change came when the Office of Civil Rights mandated that Ogden submit an acceptable desegregation plan which would lead to the elimination of racial imbalance at a specific elementary school. A positive effect on desegregation has been the addition of a multicultural curriculum. A contributing factor to successful desegregation has been the establishment of a center to investigate parental complaints and to communicate concerns to the school board. (Author/AM)

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SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN OGDEN, UTAH

A STAFF REPORT OF
THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION
ON CIVIL RIGHTS

May 1977

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PREFACE

The United States Commission on Civil Rights released on August 24, 1976, its report to the Nation: Fulfilling the Letter and Spirit of the Law: Desegregation of the Nation's Public Schools.

The report's findings and recommendations were based upon information gathered during a 10-month school desegregation project. This included four formal hearings (Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Louisville, Kentucky; and Tampa, Florida); four open meetings held by State Advisory Committees (Berkeley, California; Corpus Christi, Texas; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Stamford, Connecticut); a survey of nearly 1,300 local school districts; and 29 case studies of communities which had difficulties with desegregation, had moderate success with desegregation, or had substantial success with desegregation.

Subsequent to the report's release, considerable interest was generated concerning the specifics of the case study findings, which, owing to space limitations in the national report, were limited to a few brief paragraphs. In an effort to comply with public requests for more detailed information, Commission staff have prepared monographs for each of the case studies. These monographs were written from the extensive field notes already collected and supplemented, if needed, with further interviews in each community. They reflect, in detail, the original case study purpose of finding which local policies, practices, and programs in each community surveyed contributed to peaceful desegregation and which ones did not.

It is hoped that the following monograph will serve to further an understanding of the school desegregation process in this Nation.

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I. BACKGROUND

Demography of Ogden

The city of Ogden, located in north central Utah, has a wide range of manufacturing, wholesale, and retail firms and government installations which generate an annual nonagricultural payroll of more than $212 million. The railroad industry represents an important segment of Ogden's business and commercial life with more than 2,000 employees and an annual payroll estimated at about $20 million.[1]

The 1970 census estimated Ogden's population at almost 69,500 persons; the city's population is believed to have increased only slightly since that time. The census counted 1,881 black residents of Ogden (2.7 percent of the city population) and roughly 10,000 persons of Hispanic origin (about 14 percent of Ogden's total population).[2] Native Americans are less than 1 percent of the city's residents.

Demography of the School District

In 1975, the Ogden School District enrolled a total of 15,665 students, of whom 1,850 (or about 12 percent) were of Hispanic background; Native Americans followed as the second largest minority group within the Ogden Schools with nearly 640 students (or about 4 percent of the total); black students numbered just over 500 (or roughly 3 percent of all Ogden public school students). The system's learning program takes place in some 19 elementary schools, 5 junior highs, and 2 senior high schools.

Faculty composition in the Ogden schools during 1975 was overwhelmingly white (more than 96 percent of the total). Out of 605 teaching personnel, only 10 were black (1.6 percent); 7 were Asian American (1.1 percent); 6 were Hispanic (less than 1 percent); no Native Americans held faculty positions. Thus, whites held 582 teaching positions out of a total of 605 in a system which had a student composition which was almost 20 percent minority.[3]

II. HISTORY OF THE DISTRICT'S DESEGREGATION PLAN

Impetus for Change

In November 1969, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) conducted a routine, wide-ranging review of the operations of the Ogden School District. The superintendent of the Ogden schools, Dr. William L. Garner, recalled that the review was decidedly thorough and "investigated every transaction that we had conducted in the past 10 years."[4] The review was carried out over a 2-week period and audited all Federally-assisted educational activities within the Ogden schools.

In August 1970, HEW's Office for Civil Rights notified the Ogden schools that its review had indicated that the district was operating "a racially identifiable school, namely Hopkins Elementary."[5] The Federal agency asked the Ogden schools to respond to this finding and to inform HEW of its plans for dealing with the apparent racial imbalance in the school. This marked the beginning of a 5-year relationship between the local schools and the Office for Civil Rights during which OCR maintained continuing close scrutiny over the operations of the Ogden schools.

In October 1970, Ogden School Superintendent Garner traveled to Washington to discuss the matter of Hopkins School with HEW Officials. The superintendent reportedly contended that the alleged "racially identifiable" character of the school was unique to the area in which the school was located, but HEW officials continued to maintain their earlier finding on the school.

In November 1970, staff from the Office for Civil Rights returned to Ogden and spent several weeks reviewing records and meeting with students, faculty, and administrators. The OCR staff again suggested that efforts

be made to eliminate the alleged racial imbalance at Hopkins Elementary School.

In response to these Federal inquiries, the Ogden School District moved in 1970 to implement a desegregation plan entitled "A Voluntary Plan to Reduce Minority Group Isolation and Its Effects." Central to the plan was the consolidation of five elementary schools. Existing boundaries were redrawn to accommodate the former students of these five schools in the newly constructed Dee and Jefferson Elementary Schools. Parents within four blocks of the schools were given the option of sending their children to either one of the new schools or to existing elementary schools. The new boundaries altered the ratio of minority to majority students in four elementary schools and served as an effective means of desegregating these Ogden schools. A total of 2,209 students were affected by the initial phase of the desegregation plan.

In planning further desegregation, the school district determined that a widespread lack of sensitivity to minority students could be a major problem in the desegregation effort. Consequently the curriculum offered in secondary high schools was modified during the 1971-72 school year to include relevant black and Mexican American cultural and historical material. During that same year, the Ogden City School District initiated inservice training workshops for all teachers, administrators, and classified staff of inner-city schools. The purpose of the workshops was to develop positive staff attitudes toward cultural and racial differences among students within the school district.

Inservice training for staff was extended on June 30, 1973, for teachers and others who might be affected by future desegregation efforts. Also, during 1973, the school district hired a curriculum and instruction advisor to act in a liaison capacity between the schools and the minority community. Other desegregation strategies included changing the boundaries between Highland Junior High and Mound Fort Junior High School to achieve a racial and ethnic pairing between the two schools in 1973. The year 1973 was also marked by the return of staff of the Office for Civil Rights to Ogden for further records review and meetings with faculty and administrators.

During 1974 the district began developing remedial reading and math classes designed to overcome the educational effects of minority group isolation. To provide

individualized instruction for students and to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in certain affected schools, the district added bilingual-bicultural teachers and teacher aides.

These efforts proved to be inadequate as a means of dealing with the specific problem of Hopkins School. On February 11, 1975, Ogden Superintendent Garner predicted to the press and the local school board that "declining school populations and Federal pressures may make it wise to close Hopkins Elementary School in West Ogden."[6] Dr. Garner explained that the two strongest factors working against the future of the school were Federal concern about apparent racial and ethnic imbalance there and the decline in the number of students at the school. The superintendent added, "The small size of the school makes it uneconomical to operate. Students could be bused to one or perhaps two elementary schools already operating in the city."[7]

The final, most telling impetus for change on the Hopkins School issue came in correspondence from HEW's Office for Civil Rights, which gave the local district until July 1, 1975, to submit an acceptable desegregation plan which would lead to the elimination of the alleged racial imbalance at the school.

In June, 1975, the Ogden School Board determined that Hopkins Elementary School should be closed in view of its declining enrollment figures and continuing Federal concern regarding the racial composition of its student body. Ogden School Superintendent Garner stressed that the continued operation of the school had also come into question on economic grounds as the number of students there had declined. Plans called for students from Hopkins School to be reassigned to neighboring schools which would feature bilingual-bicultural staff. This action was taken in coordination with supporting features of the citywide "Voluntary Plan to Reduce Minority Group Isolation." The Ogden School District is receiving funds under the Emergency School Assistance Act (ESAA) to support current desegregation efforts.

Community Atmosphere

Interviews with Ogden citizens indicated that the closing of Hopkins School and the resulting shift of children to three other elementary schools caused great concern in the community. Minority and white parents

attended meetings prior to the school board's decision, but many parents believed that the closing of the school was inevitable and that they had little influence in the decision. One parent commented, "I guess we felt as though they [the school board] were going to do it anyway, so we didn't argue." Some parents objected strongly to the superintendent's proposal and the school board action. However, once the superintendent explained the possibility of the school district losing necessary Federal funds and the chances of facing a court challenge, parental objections seemed to subside.

Bonneville Elementary School received 45 percent of the redistributed students, primarily Mexican Americans, and Gramercy and Lincoln Elementary Schools received the remainder of the children. In an interview, Bonneville's principal, Benjamin Standing, said that the transfer of students had been smooth. "I would have to admit that I anticipated some problems...from the parents or the teachers, but nothing happened," he said. The principal attributed this calm to the positive approach of both his teaching staff and the school's Parent Teacher Association. "Every effort was made to answer parents' questions, to allow meetings and visits with the new teachers, and to provide the opportunity for idea exchange on the desegregation plan," Mr. Standing explained. He noted that the redistribution process had also been uneventful at Lincoln and Gramercy Schools. "Our enrollment [at Bonneville Elementary] had been dwindling and the redistribution of children gave us the real number of pupils we needed to fill up our classrooms," according to the school principal.

Superintendent Garner presented a more cautious view of the transition, indicating that parental opposition on both sides to the plan was the single factor which most impeded desegregation in the district. He further stated that opposition is still heard from minority parents.

Interviews with Mexican American and black parents indicated that their concern was with the length of school bus rides which their children were making following the closing of Hopkins School. The attitudes of individual bus drivers were also mentioned as being a problem. One minority parent explained:

> As far as the plan is concerned, it appears to be working moderately well and schools are

> progressing well, but the bus drivers have a poor attitude. They may show up too early at a specific corner and cause several children to miss the bus. We have mentioned our concern to them [the school board], but it still happens.

Other minority and white parents who were interviewed noted that the atmosphere in Ogden has remained neutral. "For the most part, our kids are getting a more culturally rounded education," said Emma Jacobsen, a volunteer coordinator for the district. "If I had my way, they would attend Hopkins because it was closer, but there has been no hassle or violence since the interracial mixing."

The burden of most of the busing resulting from the closing of Hopkins School has been carried by children, predominantly Mexican American. Most Mexican American parents interviewed said that they have come to accept busing. Yet the length of the school bus ride remains a primary concern for both minority and white parents. "Our children spend approximately one-half hour on the bus to school," complained one parent. Only 1 percent of the students were bused the year before the 1975 desegregation plan began. In contrast, 16.9 percent of the students were bused during 1976, the first year of the plan's implementation.

The bus ride necessitated by the school closing was longer than anticipated due to the temporary work on a viaduct through the center section of town. Because of road construction on the viaduct, the ride was 15 minutes longer than originally planned. Repairs on the viaduct have recently been completed.

Despite parental complaints, the closing of Hopkins has caused little or no disruption in the lives of students. Most parents stated that, despite the inconvenience of busing, they could not say that their children had voiced any displeasure with the system. Paul Van den Bosch, a fifth-grade teacher at Bonneville Elementary, observed, "I've noticed that the students are getting together for after school activities like basketball. I have noticed the exchanging of phone numbers and a general air of good relations among the minority and white students."

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DESEGREGATION PLAN

Preparation for Implementation

More than 80 percent of the faculty of the Ogden schools have received intensive training in multicultural sensitivity. Maxine Stephenson, a member of the Ogden Education Association, said that all the system's teachers were strongly encouraged to participate in the training. Teachers participating received college credit for a semester's work (3 hours) and were paid for time spent in training. Training consisted of lectures, audiovisual presentations on race relations, and guest minority speakers. Weber State University designed the course and classes were held at its facilities. The intensity of the training was comparable to that of an average college course. Students attended one-half day on Saturdays and 3 hours a week for 20 weeks. When asked about the results of the training, Tillie Gonzales, a teacher's aide at Bonneville Elementary School, commented, "Before teachers took the course, I noticed a lack of sensitivity to the needs of minority children by some teachers. I believe the courses have changed some of the teachers' feelings...or at least they are more tactful now."

Preparation of parents and the community took place during discussion meetings which outlined the steps involved in the closing of Hopkins School and the redistribution of students. Students were readied for the desegregation process through information received from parents and teachers. The religious community did not involve itself in the closing of Hopkins and the shift of students to new schools.

As a result of the desegregation plan, 15 percent of the teachers at Bonneville School were transferred. The school district, however, did not experience a decrease in staff because of the closing of Hopkins School. Three elementary schools were allocated two additional faculty

members each because they were most affected by the influx of new students brought about by the closing of Hopkins.

Community Response

In late 1974, members of the community formed an advisory committee to assist with the implementation of the desegregation plan. This committee consisted of 18 individuals from various ethnic and racial backgrounds. Some of its members were parents directly affected by desegregation and others were interested citizens representing social service organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Spanish Speaking Organization for Community, Integrity, and Opportunity (SOCIO). The advisory committee received complaints from the community and communicated these concerns directly to the school board. Several members of the advisory committee contend that parents still express dissatisfaction with the desegregation plan because they had little or no influence concerning the closing of Hopkins and little or no choice regarding which schools their children would attend.

There was no organized opposition to desegregation activities. One parent described the situation:

> After the school board made up its mind, some parents stood up at meetings and protested. But the wheels started turning and we realized that Hopkins was going to be closed. We just went along with the program.

Other members of the community, such as business and political leaders, did not voice support or opposition to the desegregation plan.

One principal commented, "It's working. We are actually carrying out the intent of the plan which was to reduce racial and ethnic isolation and reduce cost--by closing Hopkins Elementary School, we saved approximately $40,000."

Most community people and members of the faculty in the Ogden School District were not familiar with the earlier phases of the desegregation plan. Based on interviews conducted in the Ogden community, Commission staff determined that there had been a low level of community awareness of the desegregation plan until the closing of

Hopkins School in late 1975. Desegregation has not been a public issue in Ogden nor has busing of students.

Effects of Desegregation

Discussing the advantages of desegregated schools, the superintendent and two principals of the schools affected commented that students tend to learn more about students of other races and ethnic groups under desegregated conditions. Other personnel said that as a result of desegregation, the school district has an improved reading program (funded by Title I of Public Law 89-10 and ESAA funds). According to Superintendent Garner, "Based on reading test scores, there is evidence that our desegregation has...[improved] the quality of education."

Another positive effect of desegregation has been the addition of a multicultural curriculum that includes the study of black and Mexican American history. Administrators and teachers interviewed reported a decrease in dropouts among Mexican American students and an increase in school attendance among all students since the plan has taken effect. It appears that parents, teachers, and administrators have decided to combine efforts to make the desegregation plan work. One parent observed, "Ogden is just not going to erupt. We are satisfied with the quality of education and our children seem to be happy."

Interviews with students, faculty, and community members revealed that they believe the plan has increased racial harmony and that student motivation and achievement have not declined since the implementation of the plan. Teachers at Bonneville Elementary School and Ogden High School mentioned that the desegregation process facilitated the introduction of such innovations as team teaching, structured rather than open classrooms, and an ongoing cultural awareness program for teachers.

A contributing factor to the successful desegregation of Ogden's schools is the district's establishment of the Skills Center North. The Skills Center was established to investigate parental complaints and communicate concerns to the school board. The personnel for the Skills Center were consistently praised by parents for their helpful efforts.

Raymond White, the education reporter for the Ogden Standard Examiner, recalled in an interview that there initially had been some grumbling among parents, but he did

not characterize this as defiance or as an organized effort to oppose the school board. He added, "Since Hopkins School closed, we have [not] had stories about uneasiness or tension over there." Mr. White also reported that prior to the closing of Hopkins his newspaper editorialized in favor of phasing out the school.

Ogden's desegregation efforts were also facilitated because the word "desegregation" was seldom used in print, according to reporters at the Ogden Standard Examiner. "There is just little in the way of controversy or conflict that makes the closing of Hopkins School a repeated news story," Mr. White said.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In its national study, the United States Commission on Civil Rights concluded that desegregation works. The Commission's major conclusion regarding the national picture also applies to the specific situation in Ogden, Utah.

In Ogden there was an absence of violence and a minimum of community disharmony during implementation of the desegregation plan. Dissenting factions focused primarily on the delineation of school boundaries and the distance that children would have to be transported rather than on dissatisfaction with desegregation. A number of parents and interested citizens interviewed did not realize that Ogden had a desegregation plan as such; the redrawing of certain school boundaries to reduce racial isolation in several of the school districts was not generally viewed as desegregation.

The Commission's national study report pointed out that peaceful implementation of desegregation across the Nation is not a matter of chance, but rather, the result of careful planning and strong visible support from school officials and local leaders. In Ogden, Superintendent William Garner and members of the school board were farsighted enough to seize the opportunity to desegregate schools that faced declining populations. Such a decision deterred further sanctions, such as possible withdrawal of Federal funds by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The efforts of the citizens' advisory committee and the PTA in assisting implementation of the plan, plus the involvement of community groups and political leaders, did much to keep potentially difficult situations from developing.

Problems that could jeopardize the goal of desegregation still remain in the Ogden School District. These problems include social isolation within the classroom, discipline problems, a wide range of abilities which must be dealt with by teachers, lack of sensitivity on

the part of some faculty members, and the underrepresentation of minorities on administrative and teaching staffs.

The Commission's report emphasized that the above problems are not necessarily the inevitable outgrowth of school desegregation. In Ogden, where school officials have acted affirmatively to promote the success of their program, the problems do not appear to be severe. The fact that problems do exist, however, underscores a major point in the Commission's report: "Successful desegregation requires continual monitoring, evaluation, periodic review, and perhaps updating of the original plan."

Based on information received during the survey in Utah, one can conclude that the desegregation efforts in the Ogden School District are working. The superintendent's positive direction and the assistance of the PTA and the ad hoc advisory committee were the determining factors in the smooth transition throughout the desegregation plan.

The combination of cooperation and positive attitudes among parents, faculty, and community organizations made for a favorable desegregation situation. Because of these continuing efforts, it can be anticipated that desegregation, educational opportunities, and race relations will continue to improve in Ogden in the foreseeable future.

NOTES

1. Information concerning Ogden and its economy was provided by the Ogden Chamber of Commerce.

2. 1970 United States Census of Population.

3. Statistics provided by the superintendent's office of the Ogden School District.

4. Staff interviews on site, January 22-27, 1976. Unless otherwise noted, all quoted material is taken from the proceedings of the onsite visit. Names of individuals interviewed are listed in the appendix.

5. Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, letter to Superintendent William Garner, Dec. 10, 1973.

6. Ogden Standard Examiner, Feb. 11, 1975.

7. Ibid.

APPENDIX

Listed below are persons interviewed for the study in the Ogden School District.

Robert Anderson
Reporter, Ogden Standard Examiner

George L. Bell
School Board Member

Steve Brown
Student

Lorenzo Carter
Guidance Counselor

The Reverend Willie Davis
Pastor, New Zion Baptist Church

Joe Duran
Student

Manuel Fernandez
Chicano Services, Weber Mental Health

Clair Fisher
Principal, Ogden High School

William L. Garner
Superintendent, Ogden Public Schools

James Gillespie
President, Ogden Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Tillie Gonzales
Teacher's Aide

Emma Jacobsen
Volunteer, Coordinator for Ogden School District

Wayne Jensen
Businessman

Mrs. Byron Lewis
Parent

Lillian Medina
Parent

Leslie T. Norton
School Board Member

Chris Silva
Member, Spanish Speaking Organization for Community, Integrity, and Opportunity (SOCIO)

Benjamin Standing
Principal, Bonneville Elementary School

Maxine Stephenson
Member, Ogden Education Association

Jean Taylor
Parent

John Ulibarri
Coordinator of Title IV

Paul Van den Bosch
Teacher

Raymond White
Reporter, Ogden Standard Examiner

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